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Women and profession in Alice Munro's "Amundsen"

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Abstract

The latest work of Alice Munro, a Canadian author and winner of the Nobel Prize, is *Dear Life* (2012), a collection of short stories. This collection reflects her memories and her experiences. This paper explores Munro's view of female professions through the interpretation of the short story "Amundsen."

In the story, Vivien, a teacher and the protagonist, and nurses appear as a subordinate labor force for Alister, a physician. In Canada, the professions of nurse and teacher are considered to be closely related to care and child raising and thus are regarded as suitable for women because of women's innate maternal abilities. Nurses are particularly respected in Canada for their selfless care of men serving in the military forces and patients during World War I and the Spanish flu epidemic. However, Munro's nurses are indifferent with regard to care. Their indifference is caused by the patriarchal system at the hospital and their employer's views.

Other nurses in Munro's stories are commonly portrayed as cold and impersonal. In both "Leaving Maverley" and "The Love of a Good Woman," nurses never call their patients by their names. The coldness of the caretaker reflects the failure of the male employer to treat his labor force well. Alister's inappropriate management makes female careers less professional. He deceives career-minded Vivien's high ambitions for academic achievement. Female pride is undermined by a male physician; thus, the women around him share a sense of loss. They encounter enormous loss, including the loss of patients who have tuberculosis and the loss of professional pride.

Munro shows readers the cruel side of human life and demonstrates that the female characters in her works are accustomed to loss. In "Amundsen," women with professions either encounter many losses and disappointments or resign themselves to the control of patriarchy in the workplace.

Keywords: Alice Munro, care, nurses, patriarchal, tuberculosis (TB)

I

Alice Munro is a Canadian writer who received the Nobel Prize for literature in 2013. Munro is the 13th woman and the second Canadian to have won this prize. When she received the prize, she was 82 years old. She experienced World War II, and her experiences of war and her view of womanhood are vividly reflected in her short stories. The story "Amundsen" is from her collection *Dear Life*, which is one of her most autographical works.[1] "Amundsen" depicts teaching and nursing, two typical women's professions of the time.

The purpose of this paper is to theorize Munro's view of women's professions and womanhood through a comparison of "Amundsen" and her other works. The following section explains how Canadian society in general saw female-dominated professions, namely nurses, in a historical perspective and compares the general Canadian view of the time with that of Munro's. Then, I would like to describe the relationship between caregivers and patients in Munro's "Amundsen" and other works to define Munro's views of female careers. Caregivers include the nurses and teachers in "Amundsen" because both occupations were considered suitable jobs for women in the early 1900s. The final

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section examines how women's desire for professional life is rejected by a male counterpart in the same working sphere with a patriarchal control while women establish intimate friendship.

In "Amundsen," nurses themselves recognize that they are subordinate to the male physician Alister because he is an academic and a medical expert. Therefore, they always obey the physician's orders without requiring reasons. However, Vivien, the protagonist, attempts to be the physician's equal, and she tries to have intelligent conversations in a private room with him. However, the physician rejects her attitude in an ironical way because she disregards social conformities. The physician tricks her and expels her from her working sphere in Amundsen. Thus, she is forced to change her stance toward men and her profession. In the end, her outlook toward society and men changes. After experiencing a sense of loss and being deprived of her professional awareness, she begins to hold the same attitudes we see in the nurses earlier in the story. The protagonist goes through many psychological changes throughout the story, which reflects the biographical aspects of the author and the time in which the author lived.

Concerning the stories in *Dear Life*, Munro stated, "I believe they are the first and last—and the closest—things I have to say about my own life."[2] In her collection, nurses appear several times, and their manner of care is usually portrayed as impersonal and cold. Munro's doubt of medicine and her skepticism of the hospital system is reflected in the behavior of these caregivers, as if the author herself regards nursing or caregiving as mere unskilled labor, not a profession.

Munro's domestic experiences in her adolescence are reflected in her works. According to Thacker, Munro's mother, Anne Laidlaw, began exhibiting the symptoms of Parkinson's disease in 1943, when Munro was only 12 years old. Munro became her mother's primary caregiver, and she was responsible for handling domestic duties (57).[3] Munro had a motherless adolescence, and her domestic circumstances inspired her to write about womanhood and women in patriarchal working spheres. Munro's protagonist, Vivien, is a typical example of a working woman with a high-achieving educational background. She teaches orphan-like children with tuberculosis (TB) and becomes a caregiver for them. Vivien herself can never be a mother. She becomes a stepmother, a mother of a motherless child, by acquiring a ready-made family.

Women in universities and workplaces were rare when Munro was young. Thacker notes that Munro sought a scholarship to get into a university at a time when few girls received higher education. Munro's family could not afford the fee for the university, but she finally won a scholarship. Her family worried that Munro, who had never had a boyfriend, would be on her own or on her way to getting married once she was eighteen (Thacker 85-86). In the same way, Vivien, with her high ambitions, needs money to get into a master course and she needs to earn money by herself. People around Vivien are curious about her marriage prospects. Munro's experiences and her family's worries are reflected in the character of Vivien in "Amundsen." Vivien, with her higher educational background, wavers between becoming a man's equal or accepting a deceitful marriage proposal from a physician, thus becoming subordinate to a man. Therefore, Vivien and the author share several common experiences.

According to Mansell, women began to enter the labor force in the 1920s. During that time, 50 percent of the Canadian population lived in cities. At that time, teaching and nursing were regarded as suitable jobs for women because of women's innate ability or "biological qualities" (67).[4] Considering that Munro was born soon after women began to work in public spheres and began to be more independent from the financial support of men, it is natural that she focuses on two female careers: nursing and teaching.

The historical setting of "Amundsen" is sometime during World War II, as is shown by Vivien's remarks. She says her imaginary boyfriend is on a "corvette" (50), which was a naval vessel used during World War II. In addition, Vivien refers to "streptomycin" being "used in trial" (51), which helps indicate the period. At

a time when Canadian nurses were partly recognized as medical experts and people began to see nurses' profession positively, Munro continually depicts the negative side of the nursing profession. The negative image of nurses remains strong in the town of Amundsen and the fixed view of the physician in the story.

In "Amundsen," Munro contrasts nurses and a young teacher, Vivien, to show the extent of their dedication toward their work. "Amundsen" is both the title of the story and the name of a place located in the north of the province, which evokes the image of a barren and cold place. Amundsen is an isolated place, and old traditions remain there. The story takes place at a hospital in Amundsen where children with TB are isolated from society. All the children at the school where Vivien works are in the hospital known as "San" (31), which is a tuberculosis sanatorium; they receive treatment and education. The nurses in the hospital are lazy, and they do not see their jobs as professional, while Vivien, a teacher for children with TB, seriously contemplates her classroom management skills. Vivien is called to Amundsen from Toronto, and she moves from an urban area to the countryside to earn money for future study at a graduate school. She moves into the world of the cold north and gains experience before going back to her original home.

Munro introduces a typical Canadian literary writing technique in "Amundsen," illustrating the isolation of a place with the homosocial bonds of working women. Hammill explains in *Canadian Literature* that "owing to Canada's extremely diverse landscape and immense size, geography and place have always been significant dimensions of Canadian Literature, but no specific literary images of place or culture have ever been representative of the whole country" (92).[5] Hammill adds that the north has been regarded as a very influential area in art and literature and has long been privileged by critics as central to the national imagination (92). Amundsen is an isolated place in the north in which nurses enjoy outdated lifestyles and follow a traditional patriarchal hospital system in which the physician holds power over his female workers. Amundsen is an influential place for the protagonist Vivien, who is a newcomer to the area. This isolated place brings about many psychological changes in her. Her view of her career is not accepted there. Eventually, through her experience in the north, she is forced to change the ethics of her profession and her view of womanhood.

In "Amundsen," there is a boundary between urban Toronto and rural Amundsen. The sense of professional ethics, food, and views of manhood and womanhood all seem to be different between two spheres, and Amundsen is rather outdated. However, as the story goes on, the boundary disappears in Vivien's mind, and the two spheres merge into one in the end. In this story, Munro argues from a feminist point of view that the practitioners of women's professions are treated as inferior or subordinate beings to men wherever they go. Women's professions are used to enforce patriarchal aims or a male-oriented society.

Historically, nursing and teaching were considered good careers both financially and professionally, and women's roles generally involved raising and educating children both at work and in the home. However, through her stories, Munro stresses that some women are not good at teaching and nursing. She emphasizes some women's lack of caring in "Amundsen" and presents the protagonist, the ordinary, career-minded Vivien, as someone assuming a subordinate attitude toward men.

Ⅱ

Munro disregards the nursing profession and portrays them as subordinate to physicians or other male counterparts in "Amundsen" and her other works. For example, in "Amundsen," she describes a group of nurses as follows:

> Besides Matron there were three registered nurses, not one of them within thirty years of my age. They had come out of retirement to serve, doing their wartime duty. Then there were the nurse's aides, who were my age or even younger, mostly married or engaged or

> working on being engaged, generally to men in the forces. They talked all the time if Matron and the nurses weren't there. They didn't have the least interest in me. They didn't want to know what Toronto was like, though some of them knew people who had gone there on their honeymoons, and they did not care how my teaching was going or what I had done before I came to work at the San… They turned off the radio news every chance they got and tried to get music. (38)

Having experienced World War II, the author herself probably knew about Canadian nurses' active participation in the war. Instead of depicting the brave side of the nurses, the author continually shows the negative aspect of the profession. Munro's nurses have experienced "wartime duty," but their attitude toward work is businesslike or lazy; for example, they wish "to get music" while on duty. Their "wartime duty" might have been a chance to find the right man to marry, as the narrator indicates that the women were "mostly married or engaged or working on being engaged, generally to men in forces." The nurses are intent on gossiping about others' marriages and honeymoons, and they participate in girl talk. Munro's narrator implicitly disregards the women and their lack of academic interest or professional pride.

Munro's nurses show comradeship as they talk "all the time" while listening to music. Toman notes that in the early 1900s, especially when times were tough, such as in periods of war, "isolation and mutual dependency" facilitated the development of bonds between nurses.[6] In addition, they are trained to be "optimistic and cheerful" so their patients feel comfortable (Toman 173). Toman explains further that nurses were very conscious of the losses of others. For example, when someone's boyfriend was killed, everyone expressed their sympathy (Toman 175). Munro shows the nurses in Amundsen strengthening their bonds by sharing similar interests concerning their boyfriends. They all have boyfriends "in the forces," and the nurses are compassionate and share feelings of sympathy with each other. While they take care of young TB patients, they seem to be indifferent to the children and their death, but they are cheerful as they always try "to get music." Ironically, their cheerfulness is not intended to encourage the patients but to accentuate their own femininity and attract men. According to Toman, especially in wartime, nurses were both caregivers and "companions" to male officers, who frequently hosted parties and dancing (Toman 102). Considering that Munro's nurses are all going out with men "in the forces," the music they get is for dancing or for their self-interests. Hence, selfless care is not provided to the TB patients.

Jones, another literary critic, holds a view relatively similar to that of Munro herself, although Jones' image of the nurses is extreme. Jones points out in her introduction to Images of Nurses that nurses are stereotyped as "drunken, promiscuous bawd[s]" (20).[7] Jones also states that "this image of a nurse as an erotic sex object is largely derived from male fantasies based on nurses' professional necessity of handling human (male) bodies" (20). Considering that Munro's nurses used the opportunity presented by wartime duties to find their spouses and that their duty possibly turns into their self-interests, the care itself turns into an erotic temptation to attract the attention of men in the forces. Thus, providing care on the battlefield can never be a selfless duty.

While Munro's nurses are typical nurses who want to attract the men in the forces, another type of nurses in Canada are highly regarded for their work in their profession. From the end of the nineteenth century, Canadian nurses generally began to take pride in their profession. Mansell states:

> … [R]ather than being subordinate and subservient, Canadian nurses actively pursued professional autonomy. Any success obtained by these women was due to their willingness to fulfill the nursing care needs of Canadian society during a time of military, economic, or social crisis. In other words, nursing in Canada did not develop in a vacuum… The sociological debate revolves around whether nursing is or is not a profession. (Mansell 6-7)

This different type of nurses in Canada are respected, but they experienced a time in which their career was not regarded as profession.

Nurses in the early twentieth century were not always devalued. Rather, they were generally respected, especially in times of war and epidemics, because they had experience caring for wounded soldiers during World War I and II and for victims of the Spanish flu, a devastating epidemic in the early twentieth century. Mansell states that between 1914 and 1919 in particular, Canadian nurses were required to have considerably advanced medical knowledge and to demonstrate flexibility in their jobs (Mansell 67-68). In addition, according to Sutherland, with the Spanish flu epidemic, Canadian society began to show a greater interest in lowering the mortality rate of children and raising health awareness. Therefore, more school nurses were employed in an effort to help schoolchildren maintain their health in a good environment (39).[8] Thus, women began to gain employment and support their households. During this period, women became more independent from men. However, they still needed some support from their male counterparts, even in the workplace. Female workers needed to be obedient and good companions for their male employers.

Some of Munro's nurses and the physician in "Amundsen" cling to the ideas of the early nineteenth century. The nurses in the story must live up to the physician's expectations so they do not lose their jobs. The nurses in Amundsen are subordinate to the male physician, but they are not erotic. Therefore, the nurses embody the two extreme views.

Ⅲ

In contrast to these nurses, Vivien is a career-minded woman; hence, she is at odds with them, at least until she becomes engaged to Alister, the physician. Before the old nurses hear rumors about their engagement, Vivien and the nurses keep a psychological distance. Career-minded Vivien shows a critical attitude towards the care provided to the children in Amundsen. The physician and the nurses are the caregivers in this setting, but their way of treating children is businesslike from Vivien's viewpoint.

While historical nurses became more conscious of their careers after World War I, engaging in the advancement of medicine, the nurses in "Amundsen" do not. They do not show an interest in the outside world or have the inquisitiveness required to improve their skills. The physician and the nurses show little interest in Vivien's teaching and her career. As she describes it, the nurses "did not care how my teaching was going or what I [Vivien] had done before I came to work at the San." Vivien and nurses never share information on the children they care for. Vivien and the other nurses display different attitudes toward their work.

In the same manner, the physician shows an indifferent attitude toward the class that Vivien teaches. Vivien believes it is important to know about places outside Amundsen, and she teaches geography to the students by showing them place names on a globe. While Vivien is doing this, Alister suddenly intrudes on her class and awkwardly makes up imaginary place names. His attitude reflects the hopelessness he feels towards his patients, as if saying that there is nowhere the children can go outside Amundsen. He spoils her class intentionally, "calling out quite ridiculous answers, names not just mistaken but imaginary" (41), and he spoils the children's active imagination regarding the outside world. He confines the children in a closed and isolated world, and controls them. Vivien says, "In this way, with this absurdity, he took control of the room" (41), meaning that he prevents Vivien from taking control of the children's education and exercises patriarchal power over the children in his hospital. He never evaluates Vivien's positive care for the children.

Vivien sees the physician's books at his home; they are mostly about wars. This suggests to Vivien that he is "someone anxious to know, to possess great scattered lumps of knowledge," and "perhaps not someone whose tastes were firm and exacting" (48-49). This shows that he regards knowledge as power that can be used to control people. He insists on owning and controlling the medical institution; therefore, he does not allow Vivien

to manage her class in her own way. He disregards the rights of children and his employees.

Vivien, who is not a medical professional, is more sensitive and sympathetic toward the children in "San" than are the physicians and nurses. Vivien treats them as individuals. Vivien feels the care given to the TB patients is not good enough, stating, "And the covers were thin—surely people with tuberculosis needed something cozier" (42). Vivien's remark reflects the problem of caring for children in Canada at that time. According to Sutherland, the number of orphanages in Canada grew in the late nineteenth century under the strict control of the Canadian government; however, these institutions generally did not treat each child individually but treated them collectively (9-12). The dominant attitude is that of Alister, who sees the class as a mere group and spoils it mindlessly. Although "San" is not an orphanage, the staff's treatment of the children is relatively similar to that of Canadian orphanages in earlier times. Vivien is skeptical of the system and the care provided in "San," but the medical experts themselves do not recognize the failure of their ethics and systems.

Therefore, "Amundsen" negatively reflects certain old Canadian traditions. Mary, one of the schoolgirls in Amundsen, accepts that children are not embraced or welcomed by adults; she understands that once a child gets TB, the child will be removed from society. Children with TB cannot attend regular school classes, and they are separated from the other children. Mary neither complains about the ill treatment of children with TB nor insists on their equal rights to education. She understands only that Alister treats her and her friend Anabel as equal individuals. The physician celebrates Mary and Anabel's eleventh birthdays, establishing a relationship with the children not as a physician but as a friend. Although Mary's yearning for Alister is betrayed in a terrible way in the end, she affectionately calls the physician by his nickname, "Reddy" (35), showing great affection for him. Aside from this affection, she does not show any expectation for anything from the medical and educational institutions. In Amundsen, schoolchildren must deal with the death of their friends because the area is similar to a detention center for TB patients. This epidemic reminds the reader of the Spanish flu epidemic, during which time nurses were more dedicated and had a sense of mission. The laziness of the medical experts in this story is obvious when readers of the story compare them with nurses at the time of the First World War and the widespread Spanish flu epidemic.

Mary views the physician and later Vivien as unusual teachers who try to treat the children well and communicate with them equally and individually. Mary wants Vivien to be her teacher; however, due to the "stupid rules," (35) Mary cannot learn from her. Only children with TB have a chance to learn from her.

Mary seeks comprehension from Vivien. When Mary talks about her deceased friend, Anabel, she explains that the death of friends "happens around here" (35), indicating that she has experienced many losses and that she is always ready for another loss. Because her friends die often, Mary is accustomed to a sense of loss. She knows no one can save her friends. She does not expect nurses to cure them or to understand her feelings; however, she wishes to share her personal experiences with Vivien and the physician, asking both of them to see her perform the play "Pinafore" (46). Feeling that children should be respected as adults, Vivien attempts to live up to Mary's expectations of her. While the relationship between nurses and patients in Amundsen is not depicted at all, the intimate relationship between Vivien and Mary is described in detail, contrasting with the absence of the medical relationship.

Munro's works repeatedly depict a detachment between nurses and patients. In her short story "The Love of a Good Woman," from her collection of the same name (1998), she portrays a nurse, Enid, who totally neglects her duties as a nurse.[9] She is indifferent to the death of her patient:

> When she opened the door at around half past five she knew there was nobody alive in the room. The sheet was pulled out and Mrs. Quinn's head was hanging over the side of the bed, a fact that Enid did not record or mention

> to anybody. She had the body straightened out and cleaned and the bed put to rights before the doctor came. (67)

Enid's indifference to Mrs. Quinn, the patient, is similar to the relationship between the nurses and the children with TB in "Amundsen." Duncan mentions that Enid never calls her patient by her first name when she is alive. She does so for the first and last time when she uses the patient's name, recording Mrs. Quinn's death in her diary (Duncan 98).[10] This action reflects the distant relationship between nurse and patient, as represented in Munro's fiction.

Another example is found in a short story from the collection of *Dear Life*. Throughout "Leaving Maverley," a nurse does not call her patient by her first name, even when the patient's husband asks her to do so, saying, "Her name is Isabel." This was a repeated action: "He used to remind the nurses" when they would say, "Now, my lady," or "Okay, missus, over we go." ("Leaving Maverley" 86).[11] Generally, no friendship is established between nurses and patients in Munro's stories, and in "Amundsen," the nurses are cold and withdrawn. Although the nurses in "Amundsen" do not resemble whores or prostitutes, they are too obedient to the physician and they are willing to obey him because he is an authority figure, becoming indifferent to their patients. The nurses in "Amundsen" lack professional awareness, and they are despised by the newcomer, Vivien, for not being intelligent.

Vivien's remark that "they [nurses] were in awe of Dr. Fox [Alister] partly because he had read so many books" (39) shows her personal attitude of contempt for the nurses. There is a psychological distance between her and them. Vivien also says, "They [nurses] also said that there was nobody like him to tear a strip off you if he felt like it" (39). The nurses respect the physician only because he has read numerous books; this is nonsense to Vivien, who, like the physician, has read many literary works. Unlike Vivien, the nurses believe they must obey him to retain their positions. The nurses learn from the experience that disobedience to men is not valued in Amundsen. Defalco notes that Munro's stories demonstrate a risk of self-denial and self-sacrifice, particularly in a culture that persistently associates women with natural caring and selfless devotion (393).[12] The nurses may have seen the physician "tear a strip" off someone in the workplace. The nurses know that self-sacrifice means nothing in the "San" because their selfless devotion is not valued, even if their patients needed it. While Vivien takes what Defalco calls "the risk," nurses never take the risk of being unemployed. Because nurses are afraid of a man's domination in his role as employer, they do not question whether they should be subordinate to men or challenge the physician.

Hence, Vivien's professional views contrast with those of the nurses. Vivien sometimes refuses to have lunch with these nurses, and she tries to understand the schoolgirl Mary and to act more as a professional educator or maintain a psychological distance from the nurses. Her selfless attitude toward children is not welcomed or accepted by the nurses, until she goes out with the physician later in the story. Obedience is accepted and welcomed in the patriarchal hospital system in Amundsen, while diligence in work is not valued. Nurses follow traditions, or they try but fail to go against the tradition. They know they will be punished in a certain way if they challenge the patriarchy in the hospital or try to break it down and speak out about equal rights for female workers.

Ⅳ

Vivien begins to learn that women are not welcomed in the public sphere in Amundsen. Vivien comes to realize that women are received favorably at the workplace if they become subordinate to or useful companions for males. When she refuses to have lunch with the nurses in an attempt to maintain psychological distance, she finds, "The coffee shop didn't have a ladies' room, so you had to go next door to the hotel…" (43). This shows her awareness that women are generally not welcomed in public in Amundsen and that they are forced to stay at home or in the dormitory. In Amundsen, Vivien cannot find a place in which she can

relax. She thinks of public facilities, such as toilets for women, which do not exist in the public cafe. The cafe is the only place she can avoid spending time with nurses. However, wherever she goes, she has the feeling of being rejected. Even though she recognizes this, she wishes to be treated equally with men.

Vivien is a well-educated woman; she emphasizes that she has read many books and therefore can have conversations with the physician. She knows something about medicine; therefore, she deliberately brings up the subject of advanced medical techniques and operations when she meets the doctor privately. She also expresses her ambition to earn money and get a master's degree, but he does not support her. The physician's words show that he does not accept Vivien's career:

> "I guess I was really expecting some sort of old lady teacher come out of the woodwork," he said, in some slight apology. "As if everybody of reasonable age and qualifications would have got back into the system these days. You didn't study to be a teacher, did you? Just what were you planning to do once you got your B.A.?"
> "Work on my M.A.," I said shortly.
> "So what changed your mind?"
> "I thought I should earn some money."
> "Sensible idea. Though I'm afraid you won't earn much here… Not planning to get married, are you?"
> "No." (36-37)

The physician discourages Vivien, saying that she cannot earn much in Amundsen. Furthermore, by asking the indifferent question "Not planning to get married…?", he indicates his concrete presupposition that women should marry and be subordinate to men.

The physician views Vivien as a laborer, just as his nurses, and not as a professional. He asks her to share living space and meals with the nurses. He says, "Go down the hall to Matron's office and she'll tell you all you need to know. You'll eat your meals with the nurses" (37). His remark suggests that he does not find any professional difference between nursing and teaching. Although these occupations do have something in common, he regards female laborers indifferently as a subordinate workforce for men.

He denies Vivien's career and her hopes, saying "Usual notions of pedagogy out of place here. Some of these children will reenter the world or system and some will not" (39). Therefore, true learning is not expected, and the education in the institution is nothing more than a way to deal with children's boredom. When Vivien tries to be a part of Mary's private life and plans to go to her play, Pinafore, the physician induces her to break her promise. Vivien fails to keep her commitment to Mary, which implies that she has abandoned her career, and she becomes what Munro calls "a woman with a man" (52). Both Vivien and the physician break a promise to Mary, excluding her in order to establish a one-to-one relationship. When Mary visits the doctor, he criticizes her, saying that she is "on the way to getting as plump as a young pig" (55). The cruelty of the scene and her inability to save Mary from this moment changes Vivien completely. This is a turning point for the career-minded Vivien. She fails to establish an intimate relationship with a pupil, and she drops it for the sake of her marriage. She becomes more like the nurses and deviates from her professional course.

After several rejections and incurring a sense of loss, Vivien experiences the homosocial bonds between women in an isolated area at the end of the story. As wartime nurses experienced intimate friendships with colleagues on the battlefield, Vivien experiences female comradeship with the nurses. In addition, she enforces her femininity as a companion to the physician when she is off duty, as wartime nurses in Canada generally did.

As she becomes less devoted to her work, she is welcomed at her workplace. There is a change in the nurses' attitude, as is evident in the following exchange:

> But the aides teased me.
> "Enjoy your supper the other night?"
> Their tone was friendly, they seemed to approve… My stock had risen. Now, whatever else I was, I at least might turn out to be a

> woman with a man. (52)

Ambitious, career-minded women are not accepted at the hospital in Amundsen; they are excluded from the public realm. The doctor's marriage proposal is actually a ploy to expel Vivien from his sphere. Through their conversations, he learns that Vivien is not the obedient woman he expects. He plots to trap her from the beginning. Vivien doubts this, saying, "He was evidently the sort of person who posed questions that were traps for you to fall into" (36). Therefore, he decides to offend her female pride by forsaking his commitment and sending her back to Toronto. The story indicates that he has behaved similarly with other women: "I [Vivien] wonder out loud if he has put girls on the train before" (63). The physician needs to get rid of Vivien to sustain his masculine pride and patriarchal order at the workplace. When Vivien leaves for Toronto, it seems as if the train station welcomes her with the "ladies' waiting room" (63). There was no women's toilet at the cafe in Amundsen, but the train station accepts or welcomes her departure to Toronto, although she is returning against her will. The scene indicates that Amundsen rejects women in public places, while Toronto accepts women. Vivien is betrayed by the physician, and she loses hope for the future. She loses the chance to earn money to get her master's degree, and she loses the opportunity to get married.

Mary teaches Vivien how to deal with loss and humiliation just before she leaves Amundsen. She meets Mary one last time, and Mary tells her that her team lost a basketball game but that everyone seemed cheerful. Although she is only a schoolgirl, she teaches Vivien an important lesson:

> "We lost, didn't we?" she [Mary] calls out in apparent delight, and the others groan and giggle. She mentions the score which is indeed quite shameful… Not a word about Alister. Not even a bad word. She would not have forgotten. Just tidied up the scene and put it away in a closet with her former selves. Or maybe she really is a person who can deal recklessly with humiliation.
>
> I am grateful to her now… (64-65)

The physician also offended Mary's pride greatly. Her friendship with Vivien was damaged when she visited him. However, she never mentions it. She also lost the basketball game, and it seemed to be nothing to her. In the same way, losing friends and friendship is almost nothing to Mary. She has lost friends to TB as well. There is no more intimate friendship between Mary and Vivien, but Mary still looks delightful. Her life is filled with a sense of loss; however, she has become accustomed to this. She is good at dealing with "humiliation," and Vivien begins to learn how to deal with this feeling. Vivien completely loses her pride when she gets back to Toronto. Both Vivien and Mary have lost, but their attitudes toward loss are completely different.

Vivien experiences another loss after she gets back to Toronto. Vivien gets married in Toronto, but her marriage is not a happy one; she says she needs to get herself "into a more comfortable frame of mind" (65) after a quarrel with her husband. Her hope for marriage and possibly becoming a mother is also lost. She is neither a caregiver nor a good teacher as she used to be. Despite this great disappointment, she still tries to think of herself as happy. Her marriage shows her dependence on a man. Her high ambition for a career is completely lost, and she accepts her fate. This story does not reveal whether she received a master's degree. Her life goes in a different way than what she expected. Her experience in Amundsen changed her view, but even in Toronto, she maintains the same view of being a subordinate to a man, and she gives up her career. Therefore, in Vivien's mind, there is no border between the life in Toronto and Amundsen. She learns that wherever she goes, career-minded women will be betrayed and will experience a hard life. Marriage might be another option, but for her, there is no happiness either way.

V

Overall, women's ambition and their professional selves are not welcomed in the Amundsen working sphere. Although the patriarchal physician Alister does not accept Vivien's career, Vivien learns an important

lesson. Mary, a mere schoolgirl, teaches her how to persevere despite loss.

In certain parts of Canadian society, especially in the countryside, old traditions remain, and people exclude women from the public sphere; women's subordinate roles in the workplace are accepted, and people are not ready to accept women as professionals who take the lead. In the story, Vivien bravely challenges the old customs; however, she loses. A marriage proposal from an employer prevents her from further attempts to confront the patriarchal system. She psychologically assimilates with the nurses in Amundsen, although she places a psychological distance between herself and them at first.

In the end, Vivien says, "Nothing changes really about love" (66), and she accepts that her adoration for the physician compels her to become obedient. Her obedient attitude toward men does not change even after she gets back to Toronto. Although Toronto might accept a career-minded woman and the workplaces might be ready for it, she gives up her teaching profession. Affection for a man, lost love, and humiliation sometimes make a woman powerless and more obedient; she learns this, but she is not as strong as Mary. Munro's statement that "nothing changes really about love" indicates her belief that love makes woman incapable of providing selfless care to others. After leaving Amundsen, Vivien probably struggles with whether she should be an independent career-minded woman or a partner to depend on, but her struggle is not illustrated in the story. What the readers learn in the end is that she has chosen her love life, and it does not fully satisfy her. Vivien still cannot get over her relationship with Alister and the humiliation it caused her, although she has tried to overcome it by finding a new partner. From the author's point of view, when a woman loves one man, her interest in having that man overtakes her career as a caregiver. Vivien, and perhaps the author as well, still do not know how to deal with her past "humiliation" and feelings of loss; they find it difficult to balance their careers and love lives.

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